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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/31/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTH OSSETIA WATER STANDOFF

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(b)&(d).

11. (C) As of May 31, the South Ossetian "capital" of Tskhinvali has been without water for a week, producing a

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tense political standoff. As OSCE officials have described it to us, the problem started when residents of the Georgian enclave north of Tskhinvali drilled holes in the water pipeline to use for irrigation. This has happened in previous years as well -- with South Ossetians long complaining about Georgian theft of water intended for drinking -- but it was especially acute this year because a second irrigation pipe ceased to work in 2006, leaving the main pipe to Tskhinvali as the Georgian farmers' only source for water. The incident escalated when Georgian officials on the de facto border refused to allow Ossetian repair crews to enter the Georgian enclave to repair the pipe, telling OSCE monitors that they would not permit the crews in without an order from Georgian-backed administrative chief Dmitry Sanakoyev.

12. (C) OSCE has facilitated discussions between Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution Merab Antadze and his South Ossetian counterpart Boris Chochiev, but thus far without success. De facto president Eduard Kokoity has threatened publicly to cut off the water supply even farther north, in separatist-controlled territory, which would deny water to the Georgian enclave as well as to the large Georgian city of Gori south of South Ossetia. OSCE reports that the South Ossetians carried through on this threat May 31, but after three and a half hours of no water OSCE convinced them to reopen the pipe, at least temporarily. We have stressed to the Georgians the need to find a resolution to the impasse.

TEFFT